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Mazheruddin Siddiqui.

Islam with all its religious, moral, social, economic and political teachings is based on Revelation, but Revelation is the Supreme Wisdom of the Supreme Being. Therefore, there is no opposition in Islam between Revelation and Reason. For example, when the Holy Qur'ān says, "Nor does she (i.e. the Prophet) speak out of desire. It is naught but revelation that is revealed"¹, the opposition that is set up by the Qur'ān is not one between Revelation and Reason but between Revelation and desire or personal self-interest. In so far as reason is pulled by desire or self-interest, it is antithetical to revelation. But, as we shall discuss later, reason is not always governed by desire or self-interest, as some people maintain. On the other hand, the true nature of reason lies in transcending desire and self-interest and taking into view the broader interests of the community, the nation or humanity at large.

Far from being opposed to the exercise of reason, the Holy Qur'ān is the only Book among the religious scriptures of the world which lays repeated stress on the exercise of human reason and condemns the disbelievers for not using their reasoning faculty and, this it does, not in one or two places but in many of its verses. For example, the Holy Qur'ān says about the disbelievers that they are a people who have no understanding. "If there be of you twenty steadfast, they shall overcome two hundred and if there be of you a hundred steadfast, they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve, because they (the disbelievers) are a folk *without intelligence*"². Zamaksharī in his Tafseer explains this verse in the following words:-

“That is, the disbelievers are an ignorant people who fight without searching their hearts and without seeking reward (from Allah) like the beasts and because of their ignorance, they have to forego the help of Allah and cause themselves to forsake His aid as against those who fight with perception and insight”.³

Commenting on the same Qur’ānic verse, Maulāna Maudūdī says, “what is called ‘morale’ in modern terminology, Allah calls it *Fiqh* or understanding. A person who is fully conscious of his objective and who is fighting with a cool mind and a full understanding that the object for which he is risking his life is far more valuable than his own individual life is far stronger than a person who is not conscious of his objective and the person who realises the difference between right and wrong and also understands the consequences of the victory of falsehood (over truth), his strength is even greater than those who fight for the glory of their nation and motherland or who enter the battlefield driven by the spirit of class struggle.”⁴

Thus the Qur’ānic verse accusing the disbelievers of lacking intelligence and understanding and the comments made thereon by the two learned commentators establish conclusively the fact that the Qur’ān is not referring here to the practical intelligence which solves the problems of everyday life or enables us to safeguard our mundane interests, for in this type of intelligence the disbelievers of Mecca were in no way inferior to Muslims. Perhaps they might have been superior in this respect to the believers in Islam, for they knew full well how to defend their worldly interests. The Holy Qur’ān is referring here to that type of intelligence which realises the importance of moral and spiritual values in the life of a people.

Further light on this problem, i.e. the Qur'ānic meaning of 'Aql or intelligence is thrown by the following verse of the Holy Qur'an which refers to the activities of the Munāfiqūn or the hypocrites :

“Thou wouldst think that they were united, but their hearts are divided. That is, because they are a people devoid of understanding (or wisdom)”.⁵

Explaining this verse, Maulāna Maudūdī writes:

“Their second weakness (i.e. the weakness of the Munāfiqūn) was that they possessed nothing in common except hypocrisy which could have made them a strong force. What brought them together was the feeling of jealousy at seeing that an outsider (the holy Prophet who did not belong to Medina) was ruling over their city. This jealousy impelled them to make common cause among themselves and also with the neighbouring tribes hostile to Islam in order to put an end to the influence and power of an outsider. Apart from this negative object, there was nothing positive to join and unite them.”⁶

This, again, shows that when the Qur'an speaks of 'Aql or understanding and intelligence, it is something quite different from the intelligence which enables us to safeguard our personal interests or solve our every day problems. In the Qur'ānic sense, the Munāfiqūn lacked intelligence, because they lived an aimless and purposeless life.

The term intelligence or understanding (Fiqh) has been used by the Holy Qur'an also in the sense of the fear of God. For example, the Qur'an says :—

لَا تَنْتُمْ أَشَدَّ رَهْبَةً فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِنْ اللَّهِ. ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ.

“You are more awful as a fear in their hearts. That is because they are a folk who understand not.”⁷

Zamaksharī explains this verse in the following passage :

“It is possible that God means by this that the Jews fear you in their hearts even more than they fear Allah. They do not know Allah, nor do they know His greatness, so that they might fear Him the fear that is due to Him.”⁸

In the following verse of the Qur’ān, the word ‘Tafakkur’ or reflection has been used in yet another sense :

ان فى ذلك لآيات لقوم يتفكرون

Zamaksharī explains this verse in the following words.”⁹

ينظرون فيستدلون بها عليه وعلى قدرته وحكمته.

“ They exercise their faculty of observation, then they argue from it so as to arrive at the belief in God’s existence and in His Power and Wisdom.”¹⁰

Thus we find that the Holy Qur’ān has greatly encouraged the exercise of human reason by stressing the use of understanding (Tafaqquh), intelligence (Aql) and reflection (Tafakkur), but all these terms denote something different from the intelligence which enables us to solve our daily problems or safeguard our personal interests. The Qur’ān wants us to use our reason and intelligence for understanding the physical and psychological processes which lead to the belief in God’s existence, which enable us to analyse the factors that are conducive to the moral and material strength of nations, so that we may avoid the pitfalls that endanger our survival and remove the causes that make for disunity and dissensions in the Muslim community.

Muslim generally stress the immense moral upliftment brought about by Islam in the lives of its followers and they do it with full justification. But very few Muslims realise the fact that Islam also broadened the intellectual vision of

its followers and vouchsafed them a deep insight into the ordering of human affairs. For example, Hazrat Abū Bakr in his first speech, after being elected Caliph, said:¹¹

لا يدع احدنكم اجهادفانه لا يدعه قوم الا ضربهم الله بالذل .

“None of you should abandon jehād, because no people has abandoned jehād without being stricken by God with disgrace.”

Hazrat Abū Bakr could not have uttered these words of wisdom before Islam, for during the days of ignorance he knew nothing about Jehād and its utility for the strength and survival of a people. Similarly, the wisdom and intelligence shown by Hazrat ‘Umar in making some of his independent legal judgments (Ijtihādāt) during his term of office as Caliph would have remained a mere potentiality, if he had not embraced Islam and lived in the company of the holy Prophet and all the wisdom (Ḥikmat) of Hazrat ‘Alī enshrined in the pages of *Nahj-al-Balāgha* would never have fructified, if he had not studied the Holy Qurān and maintained close relationship with the holy Prophet. The same is the case with Hazrat ‘Āyesha whose native intelligence flowered only because of Islam. That is the reason why the holy Prophet is described by the Holy Qur’ān as the teacher of the Book as well as Wisdom (Ḥikmah).

When we come to Ḥadīth literature, we find that the Ḥadīth also recognises the value and importance of human reasoning. For example, a tradition of the holy Prophet says:¹²

إذا حكم الحاكم فاجتهد فاصاب فله اجران وإذا حكم فاجتهد ثم اخطاه فله اجر .

“When a ruler passes a judgement by employing his reasoning faculty and his judgement is sound, he receives two rewards and when he passes a judgement by employing his reasoning faculty and commits a mistake, he receives one reward only.”

This Ḥadīth shows that Muslim scholars, rulers and administrators of law can make independent judgements (Ijtihād) by exercising their faculty of reason in cases where they do not find a clear text of the Holy Qur'ān or the Sunnah of the holy Prophet, nor is the Prophet afraid that they will commit mistakes, if they employ their reason. Such mistakes are quite natural and yet the Prophet does not like to paralyse human reason. He would rather activate it.

Dr. Fazlur Raḥmān quotes the following Ḥadīth in his book “*Islamic Methodology in History*” which throws some light on this problem :¹³

The Prophet said, “ May God make the man prosperous who hears my words, preserves them carefully in his memory and then transmits them. For, there is many a bearer of wisdom who can not understand it himself (but can only transmit it). And many a transmitter of wisdom transmits it to some one who can understand it better.”

This Ḥadīth shows that the traditions of the holy Prophet can not be understood by every one. It requires intelligence and understanding to know what a Ḥadīth really means. That a person reports a Ḥadīth or transmits it to some one else is no evidence that he has understood the true import of the Ḥadīth. It is quite possible that the person to whom the Ḥadīth is reported understands it better than the person who reports it.

That seems to be the reason why there was some difference in the attitude of the Muḥaddithūn (traditionists) and the Fuqaha (Jurists) in the early Islamic history towards Ḥadīth. Many of the Muḥaddithūn were concerned only with collecting or reporting Ḥadīth, though some of them, like Bukhārī nad

Muslim, scrutinised Ḥadīth and classified them with a good deal of legal understanding. On the other hand, the Fuqaha (legists), particularly those of Iraq exercised great caution before accepting a Ḥadīth, because they had to deduce rules and injunctions from Ḥadīth and this could not be done without exercising a high degree of reasoning.

How human reasoning becomes necessary when new situations arise in regard to which old precedents do not apply is exemplified by the refusal of Ḥazrat ‘Umar after the conquest of Sawad to distribute the conquered lands to the Muslim army which insisted that these lands should be divided among those warriors who had conquered Sawad by their sword, following the precedent set by the holy Prophet in distributing the lands of Khyber among the Muslim warriors. On this occasion, Ḥazrat ‘Umar explained the matter to those who wanted to take private possession of the lands of Sawad in the following words :¹⁴

“ I arrived at the opinion that I should withhold these lands together with their workers by levying Kharāj on them and imposing Jizyah on their necks, so that these lands become the Fai property of the Muslims who warred in the cause of Islam and of their children and those who come after them. Do you not see that it is essential to keep men (i.e. soldiers) for (defending) these frontiers? Do you not see that these are big cities like Syria, Jazira, Kufa, Basra and Egypt and it is necessary that they be filled with armies and they be given annuities, but how can these annuities be given, if the lands and their workers are distributed (among the Muslim Soldiery).”

In this speech all the arguments employed by Ḥazrat ‘Umar are rational arguments. He quotes no authority or

precedent but merely explains that his decision is in the best interests of the Muslims and their coming generations, although as a last resort, Ḥazrat ‘Umar also quoted a verse of the Holy Qur’ān to satisfy these who differed from him. All this shows that if a situation arises to which the express injunctions of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah do not apply, Muslims can exercise their reasoning but this reasoning should be based on public interest and should be dictated by the best and highest interests of the Muslim Millah (world community). As Dr. Fazlur Raḥmān says, “The Qur’ān and the Sunnah were given for intelligent moral understanding and implementation and not for rigid formalism.”¹⁵

In the formative period of Muslim Jurisprudence, our jurists exercised a great deal of reasoning in legal matters by evolving principles like Qiyās, Istihsān, Istiṣlāḥ and Ijmā‘. But it seems that, as time went on, this process came to a dead stop, largely as a reaction against the extreme rationalism of the M‘utazila. Writing on this subject, Dr. Fazlur Raḥmān says, “since, for example, the orthodoxy first rejected the position of the M‘utazila on the role of reason, this anti-rational theological position affected their attitude to legal thought also and their standard works formally deny any role to reason in law-making.”¹⁶

The difficulty with the M‘utazila was that they applied their reason in a realm where reason can not go far. How can reason understand problems relating to the essence and attributes of God or the exact process and mechanism of divine revelation through which a Prophet receives messages from God. All these things are beyond the reach of human reason and one must accept what one has been told by the Qur’ān and the authentic Ḥadīth about these matters. Of course, it is true that

the Qur'ān employs some rational arguments for proving the existence of God and again and again appeals to us that we should use our reason to understand the power that moves the world and the universe. But the Qur'ān does not speak of any proof about the existence of God. All that it says is that there are signs (Ayāt) or indications which lead us to the conclusion that God exists. This is because God is not an observable or perceptible entity whose existence can be established by scientific proofs. Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* has exposed the fallacies contained in the three famous theological and philosophical proofs for God's existence, i.e., the Ontological proof, the Cosmological proof and the Physico-theological proof.¹⁷ Ultimately, belief in God rests on faith, although it is not a blind faith but one which is enlightened by reason. In fact, there is neither Pure Faith nor Pure Reason. All faith involves some reasoning and all conclusions arrived at by rational arguments and scientific proofs involve some faith. After we have collected, sifted and analysed all facts in establishing any rational or scientific proof, the final conclusion at which we arrive is one which is based on an act of faith. Absolute objectivity is impossible, except perhaps, in exact sciences like physics, chemistry and mathematics. Some amount of subjectivity remains even in the most scientific thinking.

So, the sphere which the Mu'tazila chose for exercising their reasoning faculty was a realm where reason does not work to its maximum extent, because the ultimate realities of life are unfathomable. Reason is given us in order to understand our human affairs, law, politics, economics and social behaviour. But the Mu'tazila made very little contribution in the sphere of Muslim Jurisprudence.

However, the reaction against the Mu'tazila resulted in the total rejection of reason in the sphere of Muslim

Jurisprudence. Discussing this problem, Dr. Fazlur Raḥmān points out that the Shī'ī position on the rejection of human reason as a sure source of knowledge is more consistent than that of the Sunnis, because the Shī'a believe in an infallible Imām who is a sure source of knowledge, while the Sunnis treat the Qur'ān and the Sunnah as a sure source of knowledge but then accept and reject human reason at the same time. He then remarks, "The only cure for this contradiction and for a smooth and uninhibited development of Islamic law and thought in general is to evince a healthy faith in the fact that the human faculties of reason and moral perception are adequate enough, if exercised well, although never beyond error."¹⁸

We now come to the two major objections against the exercise of reason. Firstly, it is said that reason is fallible, i.e. it commits mistakes. This is true, but it is forgotten that the errors committed by one thinker are criticised and exposed by another thinker and, if there is freedom of discussion and of intellectual criticism, a general consensus can emerge from these discussions through a process of mutual criticism and this consensus or, as we may call it, collective reason, is far more reliable and comparatively free from error than the ideas and theories propounded by individual thinkers, because the errors committed by one scholar are corrected by another. Secondly, it is not always the case that human reason is influenced by desire or self-interest. Even in individual life, it is reason which prevents us from being carried away by our desires and passions, because reason shows us the dangerous consequences we will have to face, if we submit to our desires. But it is reason alone which prevents us from taking decisions based on sectional or group interests by bringing before our mind's eye the more general interests of the community. Those who spurn the voice of reason and take decisions that serve

particular interests either undermine their own position in society, or, if there is no public opinion to check them, they weaken or destroy their own social fabric. As far as the field of knowledge is concerned, all true scholarship consists in rising above our personal inclinations and looking at things and facts objectively. If any person first takes an intellectual decision, driven by his personal or group interests, and then searches for facts, arguments and proofs to support his pre-formed thesis, he can not be said to be a true scholar.

As far as philosophy is concerned, there is little room in it for personal desires or self-interest. For example, when Plato propounded his philosophical theory of the World of Ideas, how could this theory be influenced by his personal desires or national self-interest. This does not mean that Plato did not commit an error. In fact, Iqbal condemns him most vehemently as being monkish in his outlook.

راعب دیرینه افلاطون حیکم - از گروه گوسفندان قدیم

Similarly, Aristotle's, philosophy in general, had nothing to do with his personal desires or the interests of the Greek nation. But it is quite probable that these philosophers were influenced by their personal temperaments. Only Hegel can be accused of having philosophised for the glory of the German nation.

Thus, although human reason is fallible, it can not be totally rejected. It is true that man makes mistakes, but he also corrects himself. Ultimately, the question hinges on the more fundamental question whether human nature is basically sound and man inclines to goodness, on the whole, or man's nature is warped and he is fundamentally wicked. Trust in reason is trust in the goodness of man and the soundness of his nature.

As far as Islam is concerned, the exercise of human reason in Islam is not as unfettered and unrestricted as in the Western Civilisation, because Islamic Civilisation is based on the revealed word of God. Any Muslim who relies solely on his reason, disregarding the express injunctions of the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, puts himself outside the pale of Islam. But if he applies his reason for understanding the true import and meaning of these injunctions and for the sake of applying them to a given situation, his conduct is beyond reproach. Islam combines stability with progress. That which makes for stability is the unchanging word of God and the Sunnah of His Prophet, that which makes for progress is the permission, nay, the obligation on the part of Muslims to exercise their reasoning faculty in order to meet new situations and challenges within the limits of the legal and ethical values propounded by the Holy Qur'an and the authentic Hadith.

NOTES

1. Qur'an : Sūra Al-Najm, verses 3, 4.
2. Qur'an : Sūra Anfāl, verses, 65.
3. Zamakhshari : *Al-Kashshāf*, Vol. II, P. 134, first edition, printed by Mustafea Muhammad Press, 1354 A.H.
4. Maulāna Maudūdī : *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, Vol. II, pp. 157, 158, Second Edition, 1958, Lahore.
5. Qur'an : Sūra al-Hashr, verse 14.
6. Maulāna Maudūdī : *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, op. cit., Vol. V, p. 408.
7. Sūra Al-Hashr, verse 13.
8. Zamakhshari : *Al-Kashshāf*, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 83, Cairo, 1354 A.H.
9. Qur'an : Sūra : An-Nahl, verse 11.
10. Zamakhshari : *Al-Kashshāf* op. cit., Vol. II, p. 324.
11. Ibn al-Athir : *al-Kāmil* Vol. II p. 138.
12. Bukhārī : *Kitāb-al-'Itiṣām*, Vol. II, Delhi, 1938, p. 1092.
13. Dr. Fazlur Rahman : *Islamic Methodology in History* Karachi, 1965, p. 45.
14. Abū Yūsuf : *Kitāb-al-Kharāj*, p. 14, Cairo, 1302 A.H.
15. Dr. Fazlur Rahmān : op. cit., p. 80.
16. Dr. Fazlur Rahmān : Ibid, p. 151.
17. Kant : *Critique of Pure Reason* p. 348. Everyman's library, London, 1959.
18. Dr. Fazlur Rahmān : op., cit. p. 163.